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ABSTRACT

On almost any socioeconomic indicator measuring achievement or material acquisition (e.g., educational attainment, life expectancy, or unemployment), the American Indian ranks lower than any ethnic or racial group, other than those most recently immigrated. In an effort to overcome the shortcomings of reservation education and to exercise internal control of the educational process, in the 1960s, tribal leaders began providing facility space to area community colleges willing to deliver an Indian-centered curriculum. While these endeavors proved to be somewhat successful in establishing good working relationships, the range of Indian-related courses fell far short of tribal expectations. With federal and private aid, Indian-controlled and directed community colleges were established on reservations to address the specific needs of the tribes. In 1972, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) was formed to provide training and technical assistance to member colleges and to develop methodologies to deliver a curriculum that would satisfy special interests, provide remedial education, offer vocational skills training, and develop lower division courses that would transfer to senior institutions. In answer to the greatest needs, the staples of the reservation community college curricula are in business management, substance abuse services, and medical assistance. In addition, all of the community colleges offer studies in tribal history and language development. Some of the colleges have achieved articulation and transfer agreements with four-year institutions as well. The two most pressing needs of the reservation communities are Indian-delivered education at all levels, and vocational/technical paraprofessionals. While the latter can help to effect the development of the reservations, the former can prepare the communities for newly emerging realities. Community colleges can influence both processes. (EJV)

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American Indian Education and the Reservation Community College

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For deeply appreciated help and
assistance to this small-town
boy nearly overwhelmed by the
great university, this paper
is respectfully dedicated to
Kathy Carroll

American Indian Education

and the Reservation Community College

The history of American Indian education is not especially attractive or filled with stories of great success, in spite of the effort expended by American educators. While some educators have determined that American Indian students are undesireables or perhaps even uneducable, the primary reasons for poor classroom performance have been the failure of the educators to distinguish between different American Indian tribes (Soldier, 1982), their cultures, value systems, and languages. Before the United States' intrusion into Indian education and concomitant control of Indian schools, some tribes- notably the Choctaw and Cherokee- had successfully administered their own public schools. From 1800 to 1865, products of these schools were more literate in their native languages than Americans were in English, and more literate in English than an average American living in Texas or Arkansas (Fischer, 1980); more recently, it has been a rarity when any product of Indian reservation schools could claim such scholarship.

Of the minorities existing in the United States, the American Indian may well be the most neglected

and mistreated (Welch, 1969). The median adult educational level is far lower than any ethnic or racial group, other than those most recently immigrated. Of all the socio-economic indicators that measure achievement or material acquisition, the American Indian is at the bottom of almost every scale (Brod & McQuiston, 1982). A rate of tuberculosis seven times the national average (Beavan, 1969) and a disproportionate rate of alcoholism (Coronado, 1977) has shortened Indian life by some thirty years; an American Indian male can expect no more than forty-five years of life. At any given time, thirty percent of American Indians are in prison or have prison records (Gover, 1973). The rate of unemployment is seventy-five percent (Kinchelof & Staley, 1982) and of those able to find employment, three quarters work for the government (Clever, 1983). Buried deep in the hinterlands of the Old West, reservations are so remote and so isolated that it is not unusual to travel sixty miles to see a movie (Kinchelof & Staley, 1982).

As might be anticipated, few Indians are able to overcome an enviroment filled with a preponderance of

statistical negatives. The United States, with a population approaching one quarter of a billion people, houses fewer than five American Indians with a Ph.D. in mathematics and fewer than fifteen Indians with a Ph.D. in the social sciences (Clever, 1983). While three percent of secondary school graduates will attempt higher education (Gelardi & Miller, No Date), drop-out rates in traditional four-year institutions have been estimated to be as high as ninty-three percent (Guyette & Heth, 1983). Even among academicaly prepared Indians, the experience of leaving the spacious reservation to pursue higher education is generally accompanied by institutional shock of such profound magnitude and deep, internal suffering that few can remain (Clever, 1983).

Tribal leaders during the 1960's, highly cognizant of reservation educational shortcomings and becoming aware of their internal need to control their educational destinies, began providing facility space to area community colleges willing to deliver an Indian-centered curriculum. While these endeavors proved to be somewhat successful in the establishment of good working relationships, the range of Indian-

related courses fell far short of tribal expectations. Tribal meetings and strategy planning continued.

Under the authorized power given to tribes to charter their own institutions, on July 1, 1968, the nation's first Indian-controlled and directed college was founded as Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona (Wicks & Price, 1981). With financial assistance provided by the Ford Foundation (Intellect, 1973), classes began on January 20, 1969, the first day of the Nixon administration. The Navajo experiment having fared successfully, President Richard Nixon, in 1970, committed the federal government to effecting self determination as policy for American Indian tribes and Alaska natives. Throughout the Old West, tribal patriarchs of the various reservations met to determine their reservation's needs and how those needs could be addressed by higher education. From these meetings would spring charters establishing community colleges or the need for them on the reservations. (Horse, 1979).

Some of the institutions that were founded were: Sinte Gleska Community College, Rosebud, South Dakota, 1970; Fort Berthold Community College, New Town,

North Dakota, 1973; Turtle Mountain Community College, Belcourt, North Dakota, 1973; Sisseton-Wahpeton Community College, Sisseton, South Dakota, 1973; Blackfeet Community College, Browning, Montana, 1976; Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, Montana, 1978 (Horse, 1979).

In 1972, six tribally-chartered community colleges formed the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AINEC) and established a central office in Denver, Colorado. The fundamental mission of the consortium was the provision of training and technical assistance to developing AINEC-member colleges. Methodologies were also developed to deliver a curriculum that would: satisfy special interest educational needs (e.g., bead-stringing, weaving, pottery making); provide badly-needed remedial education; offer vocational skills training or retraining; teach human relations (for non-Indians working with Indians): develop lower division courses that would transfer to senior institutions. The salient goals of AINEC were that the community colleges would be totally administered by American Indians and that faculty would be committed to educational excellence (Horse, 1979).

President Nixon continued to be receptive to Indian needs and in 1972 signed the Indian Education Act (P.L. 92-318) which granted special funding for post-secondary reservation institutions (Fife, 1979). In 1974, Nixon signed the Indian Self Determination and Education Act. This gave Indians the authority to interpret and set local policy; more importantly, funding was provided to train Indians in the concepts of self government. Formal recognition came at last in 1978 as President Gerald Ford signed into law the landmark Tribal Community College Act (P.L. 95-471). Among the several provisions was the granting of seed money to tribes expressing an interest in establishing a community college on the reservation. After a needs analysis had been performed, the Secretary of the Interior was required to visit the applicant reservation to make a final determination. If there was concurrence, funding would be provided. Moreover, community colleges could receive grants of $4,000 per full time student (Fife, 1979; Winchell, Porter & Saffron, 1981).

By the time the Tribal Community College Act was

passed, at least seven additional community colleges had been established on reservations: American Indian Satellite Community College, Winnebago, Nebraska, 1973; Cheyenne River Community College, Eagle Butte, South Dakota, 1973; Hehaka Sapa Community College, Davis, California, 1971; Little Hoop Community College, Fort Totten, North Dakota, 1974; Oglala Sioux Community College, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, 1971; Standing Rock Community College, Fort Yates, North Dakota, 1973; and Dull Knife Memorial College, Lame Deer, Montana, 1975 (Horse, 1979). Hence, when P.L. 95-471 was passed, at least fourteen reservation community colleges existed and these institutions could dip into Twenty-five million dollars of set-aside money that had been allocated for the first two years of the Tribal Community College Act (Fife, 1979); the third year produced Five million dollars and the fourth year was stepped up to Ten million dollars (Middleton, 1981). Other monies have come from private gifts and from philanthropic institutions such as the Ford Foundation, which donated $78,450 each to the libraries of Sinte Gleska and Oglala Sioux Community Colleges (Intellect, 1973).

As the greatest needs are in business management, alcoholism/drug abuse services and medical assistance (Guyette & Heth, 1983), it is not surprising that these needs form a basic staple of the reservation community college curricula. Of the community colleges with more than four full-time faculty, an extensive range of vocational programs, including carpentry, secretarial science, welding, automotive mechanics, computer science, building trades, water management, electronics and agriculture are offered and can be put to use in the communities immediately.

All of the community colleges offer studies of their tribal histories and language development as applied to the evolution of their societies and cultures. Blackfeet Community College offers two extensive AA degrees in Blackfeet Bilingual Education and Native American Studies (Blackfeet Catalog, 1986). Fort Peck Community College offers the AA degree in Native American Studies which includes several courses in Beadwork and Quillwork and extensive study of the Dakota and Assiniboine languages and cultures (Fort Peck Catalog, 1985). The formal study of the great traditions and cultures, including a formalization of the oral histories, can now be preserved before they

are lost forever. Formal studies of the Hidatsa, Mandan and Arikara tribes that comprise the Fort Berthold community are offered at the Community College(Fort Berthold Catalog, 1986). Sisseton-Wahpeton Community College offers twenty-seven hours of the history, culture and language (Sioux) of the Dakota peoples (Sisseton-Wahpeton Catalog, 1985). Turtle Mountain Community College has kept alive the Cree and Chippewa languages as well as the history of the Mitchif Tribe (Turtle Mountain Catalog, 1986). Sinte Gleska has developed an AA degree in Sioux History and Culture and formal study of the Lakota (Sioux) language(Sinte Gleska Catalog, 1984). All of the reservation community colleges offer college parallel programs for transfer to senior institutions.

Some of the Indian Community Colleges have managed to achieve articulation and transfer agreements with senior institutions. Standing Rock Community College in Fort Yates, North Dakota, has arranged articulation and transfer with the University of North Dakota's School of Education at Grand Forks. Both institutions are preparing Indian teachers for reservation schools- a move that will have significant and positive implications on future generations. The

rigorous program requires four full years of practice teaching (Gipp, 1979). Also involved in Indian teacher training is Blackfeet Community College which has articulation and transfer agreements with Montana universities and colleges (Blackfeet Catalog, 1986). Fort Peck Community College has developed a unique program whereby Fort Peck AA degree credits are recognized by and transferable to Dawson (Montana) Community College, which has an articulation and transfer agreement with the Montana University System (Fort Peck Catalog, 1985).

Sinte Gleska achieved articulation and transfer agreements with Black Hills State College and the University of South Dakota in 1973, In 1978, the college added two bachelor degree programs in Human Services and Elementary Education; after receiving accreditation in 1983, Sinte Gleska became the nation's first American Indian College to receive accreditation at both the two year level and four year level (Sinte Gleska Catalog, 1984). Sisseton-Wahpeton Community College, in 1981, established articulation and transfer agreements with Dakota State College (Sisseton-Wahpeton Catalog, 1985).

Tuition fees range from a low of $17.00 per credit hour at Fort Peck Community College to a high of $50.00

per credit hour at Fort Berthold Community College. Regardless of formal academic preparation, the door is open to all students. Students needing remediation in any subject and at any level are offered a wide range of choices. Coursework leading to the GED is offered at all institutions as are all financial aid programs; all of the institutions have offices to meet the needs of veterans. While each American Indian Community College can receive up to $4,000 for each full-time student, this law applies to American Indian students only. While homesteaders represent a significant proportion of the total reservation populations and the community college student bodies, as they are non-Indians the community colleges must underwrite the cost of their education (Middleton, 1981). Undoubtedly, this situation has produced tension at some of the less affluent institutions.

Each Indian Community College is a unique institution unto itself and exists on reservations in excess of 2,000,000 acres. Many classes are held in borrowed buildings or trailers and some of the community colleges have full-time enrollments of less than a dozen students (Middleton, 1981). The typical student is older than the traditional student as is the case at most community colleges (Chavers, 1982).

The major need rests with institutional accreditation; only two institutions were accredited in 1982 (Winkler, 1982), however, many have reached an accreditation status position. Without accreditation, of course, federal funding will be lost (Griffin, 1982).

Have the community colleges created a ripple effect in measureable improvements on primary and secondary school performance? The answer in Arizona would be no. In 1985, the Arizona State Department of Education bluntly stated that American Indian students "...obtained the lowest scores on reading, language and mathematics of all racial and ethnic groups across all twelve grades without exception" (Horse, 1986). Thus, a tremendous amount of work remains.

Today, there is great concern about the national commitment to Indian education and employment. A lack of funding has cut into educational programs which, staffed by Indians, has cut into Indian employment (Lankford & Riley, 1986). The Indian community college perhaps represents the last hope for many struggling tribes; if some of them fail to reverse their situations, they are in grave danger of moving from an endangered species to an extinct species. Primary and secondary schools

need teachers from the same reservation who share the commonality of experiences and linguistics. Educators not of the reservation or the culture have been singularly unsuccessful in establishing the two-way communications necessary for effective teaching. Certainly, reservation children need to be educated on the reservation; removing them from their communities to off-reservation communities renders cultural shock of such significance as to impede the transmission of conventional education.

The little communities of the reservation share two pressing needs: Indian-delivered education at all levels and vocational/technical paraprofessionals. While the latter can help to effect the micro development of the reservations, the former can prepare the communities for the newly emerging realities. The adaptation and diversity of the community college is well known, but its' potential to impact virtually an entire population may represent new challenges and uncharted territory. If it fails, it is conceiveable that a mighty people will simply vanish.

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